

Benjamin Conklin House
302 East Main Street
Cambridge City
Wayne County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-98

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
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Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

BENJAMIN CONKLIN HOUSE

Location: 202 East Main Street (U.S. Route 40), southeast corner of East Main and North Lincoln Streets, Cambridge City, Wayne County, Indiana.

USGS Cambridge City Quadrangle Map, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 16.657120.4408360

Present Owner and Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Robert Montgomery

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: This handsome Greek Revival house was built in 1839-40. It has a particularly fine recessed entrance surmounted by a balcony, and a distinctive roof, hipped on the west side and stepped gable on the east. The structure was built for Benjamin Conklin, a pioneering merchant in the area, and was used initially for both his residence and business.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1839-40.
2. Architect, builders, or suppliers: No information available.
3. Original and subsequent owners: This house sits upon Lot 42 in the original plot of Cambridge City. The following references are in the Office of the Recorder, Wayne County Courthouse, Richmond, Indiana.

1838 Deed, December 28, 1838, recorded in Book Z, page 11. George Graham, Jr. and his wife Ellen, Ira Lacjey and his wife, Catherine, and William Petty and his wife, Elizabeth, sold lots 41 and 42 to Benjamin Conklin for consideration of \$600.

1864 Deed, August 16, 1864, recorded November 28, 1864, in Book 34, page 386. Benjamin Conklin sold the property to Harriet N. Conklin.

- 1876 Deed, June 19, 1876, recorded in Book 63, page 556. Harriet N. Conklin sold the property to Margaret Robertson.
- 1877 Deed, November 7, 1877, recorded in Book 67, page 434. Margaret M. Robertson and her husband, Robert sold the property to Charter Oak Life Insurance Company.
- 1880 Deed, June 8, 1880, recorded in Book 72, page 573. The Charter Oak Life Insurance Company sold the property to Mary A. Williams.
- 1880 Deed, December 7, 1880, recorded in Book 72, page 575. Mary A. Williams and her husband sold the property to Cornelius Russell.
- 1881 Deed, March 4, 1881, recorded in Book 72, page 577. Cornelius Russell and his wife, Mary sold the property to Edward Rhodes.
- 1887 Deed, June 24, 1887, recorded in Book 86, page 181. The property was sold at a sheriff's auction to Thomas Dougal.
- 1889 Deed, October 4, 1889, recorded in Book 90, page 254. Thomas and Olive Dougal sold the property to Daniel Joseph.
- 1889 Deed, October 21, 1889, recorded in Book 90, page 289. Daniel Kimmel and his wife, Ouisa, sold the property to Harry F. Conklin, Elizabeth Conklin and Harriet Conklin.
- 1936 Will, upon Harriet Conklin's death the property was left to Harry B. Medsker.
- 1944 Deed, June 2, 1944, recorded in Book 207, page 388. Harry and Margaret Medsker sold the property to Pauline Woodward (now Pauline Montgomery).
4. Original plan and construction: Now rectangular in shape, this two-story brick structure was originally U-shaped on the main level, and possibly even constructed in two parts. The peculiar combination of a stepped gable and hip roof, the building's shape, and inconsistencies in the foundation and size of window openings indicate that the structure was built at different times. Since no written information is available which supports this notion it remains a speculation rather than a known fact.

Serving the dual function of a private residence and business quarters for its original owner, Benjamin Conklin, the building was planned to separate the family's quarters (east wing) from the counting-and-clearing house (west wing). An enclosed carriageway between the two wings achieved this. It extended from the south (rear) elevation deep into the building and was used as the entry for delivery vehicles. The five-bayed north (front) elevation, with a central distyle in antis portico surmounted by a similar balcony, gave the appearance of a single family residence.

5. Alterations and additions: [The rear, one-story gable rood ell was possibly added after the main house was constructed, and used as a kitchen.] Conklin moved his business westward across the river to Connersville's commercial district and converted the west wing of the house into residential quarters. However, the west part of the house remained sparsely furnished during Conklin's occupancy.

The Montgomerys, the owners since 1944, have made several alterations in the process of restoring the structure. Raising the level of the original carriageway to the first floor, they enclosed this space for use as a kitchen. The one-story ell was converted to a garage at this time. Other alterations included the removal of a partition from the first floor southwest room, and the addition of partitions, bookshelves, closets and a bathroom in the southwest portion of the second floor.

B. Historical Persons and Events Associated with the Building:

Benjamin Conklin, a native of upstate New York, came to Cambridge City, Indiana, establishing a reputation as a prominent merchant. In addition to his principal occupation as a commission merchant on the Whitewater Canal, he was involved in money lending and owned a large portion of real estate in town. Conklin was among the generation of men in Eastern Indiana who developed substantial economic fortunes, taking advantage of the commercial success of two of the State's thoroughfares - the Whitewater Canal and the National Road.

C. Sources of Information:

Atlas of Wayne County, Indiana, 1874.

Fox, Henry Clay. Memoirs of Wayne County, 2 vols. Madison, Wisconsin, 1912.

History of Wayne County, Indiana. Chicago: Interstate Publishing Company, 1884.

Works Projects Administration. Indiana: A Guide to the
Hoosier State. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Young, H. History of Wayne County, Indiana. Cincinnati, 1872.

Prepared by: Robert Brueggemann
Team Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This impressive Greek Revival structure is unusually large for a domestic building in Eastern Indiana. It originally served as the quarters for the owner's residence and business. The distyle in antis entrance, Carpenter Gothic side porch, and the combination hip and stepped gable roof are features which make this structure particularly attractive.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. The building has been sensitively restored and well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The structure measures 52'-0" (five-bay front) x 58'-0" (six-bay side) and is two stories high. The one-story ell on the rear (south) elevation measures 13'-2" x 23'-1".
2. Foundations: Irregularly coursed stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Red brick laid in Flemish bond on the north facade; red brick laid in common bond with headers every sixth course on east, south and west facades.
4. Structural system and framing: Load bearing brick walls with wood joists and rafters.
5. Porches, porticos, and stoops: The central entry on the north facade is a classical distyle in antis portico. The opening is flanked by fluted wooden pilasters with a key pattern fret design at the top and surmounted by a wooden entablature with a fret design at the ends. Two Greek Ionic

fluted columns stand in antis between the pilasters. The recessed door is framed by multi-paned sidelights and a glazed transom; a paneled reveal is between the doorframe and pilasters. The three steps are cut stone slabs.

Above the entry portico is a second story balcony of similar design. It is framed by fluted pilasters with a fret design and two fluted Greek Doric columns. A turned balustrade defines the balcony. The recessed door is framed by sidelights.

The one-story porch (5'-2" x 25'-6") on the east elevation appears to have been added sometime during the late nineteenth century. This however is unknown. Designed in the spirit of Carpenter Gothic, the elaborately carved wooden trim stands out against the classical structures otherwise severe outlines. Eight flat columns of sawed scroll work, with scroll work brackets forming ogee arches, support the asphalt shingled hip roof. Access to the interior is through two single doors; three concrete steps lead to a formal garden.

On the second floor of the south (rear) elevation, a recessed porch is above the enclosed carriageway area which is on the first floor, now the kitchen. Two chamfered hexagonal columns with a connecting balustrade are the porch's only trim. A wooden deck with a turned wooden balustrade, measuring 15'-11" x 4'-5", extends out from the kitchen.

6. Chimneys: There is one inside end chimney on the east elevation; three chimneys on the south (rear) slope, and one on the west slope.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The central north door is wood painted black with a single moulded panel. It is framed by multi-paned sidelights and a glazed transom. The second-story balcony door is wood painted black with two moulded panels. It is framed by four-paned side-lights and fluted pilasters surmounted by a wide plain entablature. All trim is painted white. A double floor in the first bay on the west elevation and a door with a three-light transom in the fifth bay were probably used originally as entries into Conklin's shop. These entries now permit direct access from the exterior into the west parlor and formal dining room respectively. A double door on the south elevation leads into the kitchen. Access to the interior's sitting room and dining room from the east porch is through two single doors, each with a movable transom overhead.

- b. Windows: The windows on the north facade, with the exception of the northwest first floor windows, are six-over-six double hung sash. The window openings on the northwest are wider, having eight-over-eight lights. The six window openings on the east facade are nine-over-six light double hung sash. The two attic windows on this elevations are all six-over-six light double hung sash. Mullions on all windows are wood and sills and lintels are flush stone. Louvred wooden shutters painted black are on all windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: The main house has an unusual combination of a hip and gable roof. The west half is covered by a hip roof and the east half has a gable roof with a stepped gable end. Black asphalt shingles cover wooden shingles. The garage ell has a gable roof with a ridge running north-south.
- b. Cornice and eaves: The entablature has simple mouldings: A gutter is built into the boxed wooden cornice. Trim is painted white.
- c. Dormer, cupolas, towers: An open wooden belfry is on the ridge of the garage roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement, which is used for a storage and as a workshop and utility room extends under the west wing (20'-1" x 58'-0") and the northern section of the east wing (31'-11" x 20'-0"). The remaining area is unexcavated.
- b. First floor: The first floor plan is nearly symmetrical about the central entry hall in front and the large kitchen at the rear. A staircase on the central hall's west wall leads to the second floor. Two nearly square parlors are to each side of the main hall. The west parlors are to each side of the main hall. The west parlor, originally the counting room (18'-0" x 19'-10") leads to the large rectangular formal dining room (19'-0" x 35'-8"). The east parlor (18'-10" x 17'-10"), the more formal of the two rooms, leads to the sitting room, which leads to a small dining room. In the center of the house, the original carriageway has been enclosed, and is used as the kitchen vestibule and kitchen.

- c. Second floor: The main stair landing has two doors opening to the east and west bedrooms. Each of these rooms has a door leading to a rear bedroom. A stair from the kitchen vestibule leads to a workroom over the kitchen, which is also accessible from the rear bedrooms.
2. Stairway: The stair in the main entry hall is rounded with winders at the turn. The oval stair rail is supported by turned wooden balusters. The rail terminates in a volute at the bottom newel, supported by a cluster of balusters with a fluted post in the center. Decorative brackets ornament the outside face of the tread. Risers, treads, balusters and brackets are painted white; rail is painted a dark brown. Stairs leading to the basement are in the kitchen. An enclosed straight run of stairs leads from the kitchen vestibule to the second-story workroom.
3. Flooring: Basement has concrete flooring. A diagonal patterned black-and-white tile covers the front entry hall. Wood flooring is in all other rooms.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All rooms are wallpapered except for the kitchen, vestibule and second-story workroom and southwest bedroom. The east and west walls of the kitchen are brick. All ceilings are painted white over plaster, with the exception of the second floor southwest bedroom, which has exposed diagonal framing with fiber board refill.
5. Doorways and doors: All doors are wood, and are decorated with either two long, vertical moulded panels, or four moulded panels in two tiers with square upper panels and rectangular panels below. Some openings are framed by a simple narrow architrave. All doors and trim are painted white.
6. Special decorative features, trim, cabinet work: The entry hall staircase's outer string has carved scrollwork brackets and turned balusters supporting the oval hand rail; the rail ends in a volute at the bottom newel, supported by a cluster of balusters; the spandrel is trimmed with receding triangular panels. Cabinets with plain single-panel doors are built into the south wall of the small dining room.
7. Hardware: Most doors have brass box locks, painted black.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: Fireplaces are in the east parlor, sitting room, and small dining room. The mantel in the parlor is trimmed with Ionic pilasters and a wide entablature. A boiler centrally heats the house through individual room convectors.
- b. Lighting: Electric wiring is concealed.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house stands on a corner site, facing north to U.S. Route 40 (now East Main Street) and west to Lincoln Drive. An old mill is to the south. The area is principally residential with tree-lined streets.
2. Historic landscape design: Landscaping, walks, enclosures: A formal sculptured garden is to the east of the Carpenter Gothic porch.
3. Outbuildings: None.

Prepared by: Mort Karp
Project Supervisor
Historic American Buildings
Survey
September 1978

Edited by: Jan E. Cigliano
Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
September 1978

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. The structure was measured and drawn in the summer of 1974 under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Associate Professor Mort Karp (University of Arkansas), with architect Harry Hunderman (University of Michigan), student assistant architects, Scott Bernard (University of Pennsylvania), Mark Hall (Pennsylvania State University), Richard Perlmutter (Yale University), and architectural historian Robert Brueggmann (University of Pennsylvania), at the HABS Field Office, Earlham College, Wayne County, Richmond, Indiana. The data was edited and expanded in HABS office by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in 1975.

ADDENDUM TO
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